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OUR FLAG STILL FLIES:

ON FRUITLESS LGBTQ+ ERASURE AT STONEWALL

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An angle of the outer fenced area of the Stonewall National Monument with pride flags hanging from the fencing.
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At the Stonewall National Monument in Greenwich Village, the first national monument dedicated to LGBTQ+ history that honors the protests that set off the modern LGBTQ+ rights movement, a pride flag flies.

It flies as an emblem of love and acceptance, but more than that, it flies today because it was rightfully restored by local officials and community members after being taken down by the National Park Service last week. While this move was purportedly in compliance with a recent memo on flag-flying policy for national monuments, recently released by the Department of the Interior, in reality, it was just a poorly disguised act of plain and pathetic homophobia.

For one thing, within the new policy, there is already the framework for allowing the pride flag to be flown at Stonewall. While the policy states that in general only the U.S., DOI, and POW/MIA flags may be flown at national monuments, it offers many exceptions to that rule. The first allows for other flags to be flown if they hold historical significance to the monument. It is quite clear to see that the singular flag which represents the LGBTQ+ rights movement is extremely historically significant to the monument which honors that very movement.

Now, a likely rebuttal is that the pride flag is in violation of certain religious beliefs and therefore to fly it would violate the First Amendment's Establishment Clause, whereby the government cannot endorse or invalidate any religion. However, that argument rests on a fundamental misunderstanding of what the pride flag stands for. It is not a flag which concerns religion or non-religion; being part of the LGBTQ+ community is not affiliated with any religious identity, as proven by the many LGBTQ+ people who hold varied religious beliefs and the many who do not. Therefore, while there may be those who argue that, say, a transgender identity is against their own personal religious belief (which they are entitled to hold), it still stands that the pride flag and the LGBTQ+ movement do not compel anyone to be transgender. The flag's message is simply that anyone who holds that identity is equally valid, that you shall come as you are and trust that you will find acceptance — which, by the way, is a profoundly American ideal.

Others may argue that the pride flag is an inherently political flag and therefore cannot be flown at a federal monument. I won't deny that the pride flag has its political significance, yet I would also ask in return what political statement it makes that isn't already inherent in the creation of the Stonewall National Monument. Of course, this is not to say that the monument is not valid. After all, if the flag and the monument hold political weight, then so do so many other beloved national monuments. Are the Washington Monument and the Lincoln Memorial unacceptable because they honor figures of decided political parties and revolutionary opinions? Should the Belmont-Paul Women's Equality Monument shutter its doors because women's rights are an inherently political issue? What about the Birmingham Civil Rights Monument, for that matter? Of course, the answer is that these monuments all belong and enrich our country because they honor those who were instrumental in shaping it for the better (some more than others, I would argue, but I digress). Further, the truth becomes clear that in memorializing the history of our nation, a political state, we cannot refrain from touching upon politics. The Stonewall National Monument is no different.

Clearly, the only reason there could be to remove the pride flag from the monument is to try to erase LGBTQ+ identity from our national history. And sadly, this is not the first example of this kind of erasure that Stonewall has seen recently. A year ago, the Trump Administration deleted references to queer and transgender people from the monument's website and reverted the acronym "LGBTQ+" to the outdated and incomplete "LGB."

Yet, on that occasion and again this past week, members of the LGBTQ+ community and allies alike showed up at the monument and spoke out, making their presence seen, heard, and above all known. The truth is that this community has always been here and always will be; we cannot truly be erased so long as we continue to have pride in who we are.

